

To: City Council
CC: City Manager Ken Coleman
From: City Clerk Gail Davidson
Date: January 16, 2015
Re: Regular Municipal Election Discussion

Councilors:

The May 12, 2015, Regular Municipal Election will be upon us before we know it. I would like to discuss some items with Council before further proceeding down the “preparation path”.

First, a little background. The federal government, through the “Help America Vote Act” and the state legislature through numerous changes in the election laws, recognize the fundamental right of every citizen to vote. To that end, they have passed legislation – almost yearly – to make it easier for eligible citizens to vote in elections. One major change is the creation and maintenance of a state-wide voter registration database that tracks voters and helps eliminate registered voters from voting in multiple elections. The Gunnison voter registration database is maintained through the Gunnison County elections office. The City obtains our election registration list from that office. The State has also decided that recent state-wide elections be conducted by mail ballot. This is partially in response to the high number of state voters that had elected to be included in a permanent mail ballot voting list.

As you are probably aware, the recent November election had some issues in the County. Subsequently, several editorials were published in the Valley’s newspapers calling for the return to one day polling place elections. The City has not utilized polling place elections for the Regular Municipal Election since 1995. The change was made to conduct our elections by mail ballot in an effort to increase the voter turnout that had dwindled to less than 15% in some cases. Over the intervening elections, we have seen increases in voter participation which we attribute to mail ballots being utilized. Of course, years with “hot issues” result in higher voter participation. Voters have commented that it is more convenient for them to vote in the privacy of their home, not have to take time out of their busy schedules to make it to the polls and they like the ability to receive the ballot and then more fully discuss or investigate the candidates or issues. The City has always maintained a polling center at City Hall for those voters who still like to vote on Election Day. We encourage voters to vote by the means most comfortable for them. Municipal Clerks state-wide, myself included, feel that making it easier for all eligible voters to participate in an election is our highest goal.

My recommendation is to conduct the City’s May 12, 2015, by Mail Ballot. I would like to discuss this with you and if you have consensus, I will bring forth a resolution in late February for Council action to authorize the election to be conducted by mail ballot.

Thank you,
Gail